

South Meeting House
Meeting House Hill, facing Marcy Street
Portsmouth
Rockingham County
New Hampshire

HABS No. NH-105

HABS
NH
8-PORT,
76-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SOUTH MEETING HOUSE

HABS No. NH-105

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Location: Meeting House Hill, facing Marcy Street,
Portsmouth, Rockingham County, New Hampshire

Present Owner: City of Portsmouth.

Present Occupant: Unoccupied (formerly Headquarters for Disabled
Veterans Association).

Present Use: Unoccupied.

Significance: This is one of the landmarks of Portsmouth. It
replaced the Old South Meeting House built in
1731, which was demolished in 1863. Its steeple
can be seen by mariners far at sea, and was their
guide for entering Portsmouth Harbor.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History: Two-and-a-half stories, wooden frame building,
with clock and bell tower.

1. Date of erection: 1866. Portsmouth Journal, Sept. 22, 1866.
" Work on the Ward Room is progressing well, on site of Old So.
Meeting House"
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Original structure was used by
South (Congregational) parish. The present building was used by
other denominations, and by the city for a public school. In
recent years it has been used for a club house and a Ward Room
for voting in the South End of Portsmouth.
4. Builders, suppliers: Committee on city Lands and Buildings,
authorized to erect this building. City Council meeting.
August 4, 1866. Portsmouth Journal of that date.
5. Original plans and construction: Not extant.

Wooden frame building. Two meeting rooms, or public halls, on
first and second floors. Clock tower (with clock) topped with
handsome belfry. Portico across the front of the building.
6. Alterations and additions: No indications of any additions or
alterations.

B. Historical Context:

This building has been used for religious services of various denominations throughout the years; for public meetings, lyceums and lectures. One room in the building was known as the Manning School at one time. For many years it was a public voting place for the residents of the South End of Portsmouth. Its old clock gave the "South Enders" the time of day for generations, and its high steeple was a beacon to many weary sailors coming home from the sea. The Old South Meeting House has been painted by noted artists, among them Charles Woodbury of Ogunquit, Maine, and Childe Hassam.

Note: From Portsmouth Journal, August 29, 1863: " Old South Meeting House was sold at Auction by J. B. Adams, Esq. on Saturday last to William B. Russell, who purchased the shell for \$170.00. Leonard Cotton, purchased the linings of the pews for \$30.00"

PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Important old views: Photograph from News and Views of Strawberry Banke. January 1963.

Photograph from "Portsmouth Historic and Picturesque" by Gurney. 1902.

B. Bibliography:

1. Secondary and published sources:

Portsmouth Journal (newspaper) August 22, 1863 - September 22, 1866.

"Four sermons" by A. P. Peabody, 1895. Published in Portsmouth, N. H., 1859, by James F. Shores, for Joseph Foster, contains a History of the old South Meeting House. p. 107.

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

City Hall records. City Reports. School Reports for City of Portsmouth.

Portsmouth Historic and Picturesque" by C. S. Gurney. Portsmouth. 1902. pp. 140-141. (illustrated).

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